

GIO LINH

Gio Linh, a district capital and former site of an ARVN military outpost, is located along Route 1 in the northern part of Quang Tri Province, 18 miles north of the city of Quang Tri and 2 miles from the DMZ (see 1:250,000 and 1:100,000 maps). Northern Quang Tri Province was overrun by NVA forces in May 1972 and subsequently heavily damaged by B-52 bombing. Still under Communist control, most of the northern part of the province is devastated and unpopulated except for NVA and VC military personnel and a sprinkling of Communist sympathizers. Although the NVA has free reign to enter the province from the DMZ at any point, infiltration channels remain concentrated principally in the mountains in the west.

Route 1 is trafficable the 35 miles between Hue and the city of Quang Tri. Because of 1972 bomb damage to the highway between Quang Tri and Gio Linh, however, travel to Gio Linh will have to be by aircraft until road repairs can be made. Paved and with a normal driving time of only half-an-hour, this stretch of the highway was extensively cratered and several key bridges were destroyed. While shorter bridges can readily be rebuilt, the 787-foot one across the Song Thach Han at Quang Tri and the 505-foot structure across the Song Bo Dieu at Dong Ha will require major engineering efforts to replace. Vietnamese POWs released in the prisoner exchanges have been ferried across the Song Thach Han. Few streams can be forded because of deep waters, soft bottoms, and steep banks.

Damage to the airfields at Dong Ha and Quang Tri remained unrepaired in early 1973, and flights of C-123- or Caribou-size craft from Saigon can terminate no further north than Camp Evans, along Route 1 twelve miles north of Hue. From there, small craft can fly to Gio Linh. Although there is no landing strip at Gio Linh, nearby sections of Route 1 are straight and uncratered and can be used for landing by small planes. Helicopters can land at a chopper pad at the former ARVN outpost north of town (now largely destroyed), on the highway, or -- during dry weather -- on the rice paddies.

Gio Linh is located in a generally flat, rice paddy-blanketed lowland strip that extends northwest - southeast through Quang Tri Province. North of Gio Linh, however, hills rise more than 100 feet, breaking the otherwise flat monotony of the landscape. Wooded tracts are few, and good observation is afforded northward to the DMZ from the former ARVN outpost on a hill north of Gio Linh (see 1:10,000 Sketch Map). The lowland is poorly drained, spotted with lakes and marshes and crossed by a number of meandering streams. Most streams are plied by sampans or other small craft. Much of the plain is inundated for several months, especially during the September to January rainy season when travel on secondary roads is often precluded.

A 3-mile wide belt of sand dunes, with elevations as high as 100 feet, extends from the lowland to the Gulf of Tonkin. Some dunes are

barren, others are covered with sparse grass and low evergreen shrubs. Groves of pine-like casuarina trees are scattered over the dunes. To the west of the lowland, the foothills of the Annam Mountains are clothed in mixed evergreen forests and grasslands.

Persons familiar with the June to October rainy season and the monotonously high year-round temperatures of Saigon will have to adjust to different climatic conditions at Gio Linh. Exposed more to the chilly winds of the northeast monsoon than to the warm winds of the southwest monsoon, Gio Linh -- and all of coastal South Vietnam north of 12° north latitude -- experiences a different rainfall regime and a wider seasonal range in temperature than the Mekong Delta. Crachins, typhoons, and the "winds of Laos" also contribute to the unique climate of the northern coastal zone.

Heavy rains begin in September and continue into January. More than 20 inches are usually recorded in both October and November at Quang Tri (the nearest city with recorded climatic data). Showers occur almost daily, usually starting in the late afternoon and continuing well into the evening. From January until April or May, crachin weather sets in; extensive cloud cover, fog, drizzle, and chilly temperatures may persist for weeks at a time without a break.

While rainfall is relatively light from April to September, thunderstorms and strong winds are frequent. The city of Quang Tri, for example, records an average of 13 thunderstorms during May. Turbulence may be severe in the storm cells and light aircraft should

avoid them.. In July and August, even when skies are clear, ground winds of more than 35 knots are common. They preclude the landing of small aircraft. Typhoons, with destructive winds, torrential rains, and widespread flooding, may hit the northern provinces of South Vietnam once every two years or so, usually during the period June to December.

Gio Linh experiences its highest temperatures from May to September when daily highs usually climb into the low 90's. The heat is aggravated by the "winds of Laos" that blow down the eastern slopes of the Annam Mountains in hot, dry, and gusty torrents. During the September to April rainy season, on the other hand, the winds of the northeast monsoon chill the area and nighttime temperatures may plummet into the 50's. Heaters and warm clothing are essential.

The population of Quang Tri Province prior to the Spring 1972 NVA offensive had been somewhat more than 300,000; Gio Linh district had a population of about 35,000, most living in the town or in villages along Route 1. Homeless after the offensive and subsequent bombing, most people in the province have resettled at refugee camps at Hue, Danang, or other sites in Military Region I; others fled northward into North Vietnam. Refugees in the South Vietnam camps began to return to their Quang Tri homes in mid-March but undoubtedly will remain in the southern part of the province until the security situation stabilizes in the north. Refugees who went to North Vietnam may now

be returning to the Gio Linh area.

Although the Gio Linh area is not known to have been systematically mined, the presence of mines, bomb duds, and booby traps on and along roads in the district should not be ruled out. Anti-personnel mines saturate several areas along Route 9 on the way to Khe Sanh and Lao Bao. Minefields may also still be found in the vicinity of the city of Quang Tri.

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Approved For Release 2001/03/06 : CIA-RDP84-00825R000300410001-5

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Approved For Release 2001/03/06 : CIA-RDP84-00825R000300410001-5

SKETCH MAP
of
GIO LINH
and VICINITY
QUANG TRI PROVINCE
(16°56'N - 107°05'E)
0 1/4 statute miles
1:10,000

